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XI.—THE SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE OF DANTE'S
VITA NUOVA.

At the beginning of the *Vita Nuova* Dante tells us that he proposes to copy into the little book words which he finds written in the book of his memory under the rubric *Incipit Vita Nova*; thus he brought together lyrics that he had already written, and connected them by a narrative and analysis in prose.¹ The *Vita Nuova* belongs, then, to the class of writings made up of alternating prose and verse. As in the case of the *Convivio*, this method of composition was perfectly natural under the circumstances; Dante doubtless intended to do for his own early poems what had been done for certain Troubadours by the compilers of some of the Provençal anthologies, in which a prose biography is interspersed with specimens of the poet's verse. This has been

¹The edition cited here is: *La Vita Nuova di Dante Alighieri*, con commento di T. Casini, 2a edizione, Firenze, 1891. E. Moore's edition (in *Opere di Dante*, Oxford, 1894) and Prof. Norton's translation agree with Casini in chapter-numbers 4 to 26; as they divide into two the chapter that Casini numbers 26, their following numbers are one higher than his. Witte's edition agrees with Moore's beyond cap. 3.

pointed out by Pio Rajna,¹ who further suggests² that the analytical *divisioni* may have been modeled on certain works of St. Thomas. The prose explanations in the Provençal anthologies are called *razos*, and Dante uses the word *ragione* with the same meaning.³ In at least one respect, however, the *Vita Nuova* differs in form from the other works of this type; for the poems do not simply follow one another chronologically or according to the exigencies of the narrative, but are arranged on a symmetrical plan. The credit for having made this plain belongs to Professor C. E. Norton, who pointed it out in 1859. But more than twenty years earlier Gabriele Rossetti had explained the essential features of the symmetrical arrangement in a letter to Charles Lyell, dated January 13, 1836, which was printed for the first time in 1901, and which reads in part as follows:⁴

"The interpretation of the *Vita Nuova* depends upon knowing what portions of it are to be taken first, and what portions are to be taken last. This enigmatic booklet contains thirty-three compositions (*vide* your Index), relating to the thirty-three cantos of each section of the *Commedia*. These poetic compositions are to be divided into three parts, according to the three predominant canzoni. The central canzone, which is "Donna pietosa," is the head of the skein, and from that point must the interpretation begin; then one must take, on this side and on that, the four lateral sonnets to the left, and the four to the right—(the last one to the right has been somewhat altered by Dante, but it is in fact a sonnet). On this side and on that follow the two canzoni, placed symmetrically; and the one explains the other. And thus, collating the ten compositions to the right with the ten to the left, we come finally to the first and the last sonnets of the *Vita Nuova*, which contain two visions. . . . The central part, which constitutes the Beatrice Nine, consists of nine compositions."

¹*Lo Schema della Vita Nuova*, Verona, 1890; cf. Scherillo, *Dante e Bertram dal Bornio*, in *Nuova Antologia*, LXXI, 94 (1897); *Giornale Storico d. Lett. Ital.*, xvi, 474 (1890).

²*Per le "Divisioni" della "Vita Nuova,"* in *Strenna Dantesca* compilata da Bacci e Passerini, I, 111, Firenze, 1902.

³*V. N.*, cap. 35, 36, 37, 39, 40; cf. Crescini, *Le "razos" provenzali e le prose della "Vita Nuova,"* in *Giornale Storico d. Lett. Ital.*, XXXII, 463 (1898); and Tobler in *Archiv f. d. Stud. d. Neueren Sprachen*, LXXXV, 121.

⁴*Gabriele Rossetti, a versified Autobiography, translated and supplemented by William Michael Rossetti*; London, Sands & Co., 1901, p. 137.

It is to be noted here that Rossetti, seeing clearly the symmetrical arrangement of the poems, made it a part of his system of interpreting Dante's works; and also that he gave the number of the lyrics in the *Vita Nuova*, which in reality is thirty-one, as thirty-three. As he indicated, he derived this number from the first edition of Lyell's translation¹ of Dante's lyrical poems. Lyell numbers continuously the lyrics of the *Vita Nuova*, and includes among them Guido Cavalcanti's reply to the first sonnet; he also counts separately the alternative beginnings of the eighteenth sonnet, and thus arrives at thirty-three numbers. In his second edition² he changes his system of numbering. A few years later Rossetti published a statement of his discovery,³ still giving the number of poems as thirty-three, and now stating definitely that one of them is by Cavalcanti. He divides the poems into three groups, the first and the last each containing eleven brief compositions, while in the centre are eight sonnets and *tre sole canzoni solenni*. The first *canzone* and the last treat respectively the life and death of Beatrice, while the central one contains the germ of the fiction of the whole book. Now, if we put *ten* in place of *eleven*, this scheme agrees essentially with the one to be explained presently. Rossetti perhaps repeated his statement in the unpublished portion of his *Beatrice di Dante*, of which only the first part was printed.⁴ The manuscript was turned over to Aroux; and Rossetti was displeased to find his theories carried by this writer to an

¹*The Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri*. Translated by Charles Lyell, Esq.; London, Murray, 1835.

²*The Lyrical Poems of Dante Alighieri*. Translated by Charles Lyell, A. M.; London, William Smith, 1845. This edition differs in various ways from the first.

³G. Rossetti, *Il Mistero dell' Amor platonico*, London, 1840, vol. II, p. 637. This passage was pointed out and discussed by Federzoni, *Questioni Dantesche: Vecchie e nuove considerazioni sul disegno simmetrico della "Vita Nuova,"* in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, XXIV, no. 43; 26 Ottobre 1902.

⁴*La Beatrice di Dante*, di Gabriele Rossetti. Londra, stampato a spese dell' autore, 1842.

extreme that he himself could not approve.¹ The ideas expressed in the following passage² on the *Vita Nuova* seems to have been derived by Aroux from Rossetti; the number thirty-three, in particular, he would hardly have found elsewhere:

“Ce bizarre opuscule contient trente-trois compositions poétiques. Ce nombre est exactement en rapport avec celui de chacune des trois parties de la *Comédie*. Leur disposition symétrique est telle, qu’elles se trouvent exactement divisées par onze, et que parmi elles, dominant le tout, se déploient trois Canzoni solennelles, dont celle du milieu contient le germe de toute la fiction de l’ouvrage, fiction qui va se développant de droite et de gauche,” etc.

Buried in Rossetti’s manuscript and in this book by Aroux, which well deserves the epithet *bizarre* that its author applies to the *Vita Nuova*, the symmetrical arrangement awaited a new discoverer. But as a curious example of the persistence of error, we may note that Dr. Edward Moore,³ apparently following Aroux for the moment, gives “the number of the poetical compositions of the *Vita Nuova*” as thirty-three.

In 1859 Professor Charles Eliot Norton published⁴ *The New Life of Dante. An Essay, with translations*. In an appendix was a note “On the Structure of the *Vita Nuova*,” reprinted in the subsequent editions of the complete translation. Before going further, we must see how the theory of symmetrical arrangement is deduced. The book contains thirty-one lyrics, arranged in the following order:

5 sonnets
1 ballata
4 sonnets
1 canzone
4 sonnets

¹ See *Dante hérétique, révolutionnaire et socialiste*, par E. Aroux; Paris, Renouard, 1854. Cf. *Autobiography of Rossetti*, p. 68; and Z. Benelli, *G. Rossetti, notizie biografiche e bibliografiche*, Firenze, 1898, p. 38.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

³ *Studies in Dante*, second series, Oxford, 1899, p. 121, note.

⁴ At Cambridge, Mass., in a limited edition. The translations, but not the appendix, had already appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The complete translation was published at Boston in 1867 and again in 1892.

1 *canzone*
 3 sonnets
 1 stanza
 1 *canzone*
 1 sonnet
 1 imperfect *canzone*
 8 sonnets.

The three *canzoni* are longer and more elaborate than the other poems, having respectively 70, 84, and 76 verses; the second is the longest, and occupies the central position, with fifteen poems on each side of it. The fourth *canzone*, with 26 verses, the *ballata*, with 44, and the second and fourth sonnets—*sonetti rinterzati*, with 20 verses each—are nearer in length to the ordinary sonnets than to the *canzoni*. The *stanza*, according to Dante's statement, was the beginning of a *canzone*, the composition of which was interrupted by the death of Beatrice; it has 14 lines, and metrically it is so nearly like a sonnet that it may be called one. We may, then, reduce our scheme to this:

10 minor poems, all sonnets but one.

CANZONE I

4 sonnets

CANZONE II

4 sonnets

CANZONE III

10 minor poems, all sonnets but one.

Moreover, the first and third *canzoni* correspond strikingly to one another. The first, called *figliuola d'amore*, is in praise of the living Beatrice, who is desired in Heaven; Dante speaks,

“Donne e donzelle amorose, con vui,
 Che non è cosa da parlarne altrui.”

The third, called *figliuola di tristizia*, is in praise of the dead Beatrice, who has gone to Heaven, and contains these words, referring to the former *canzone*:

“E perché mi ricorda che io parlai
 De la mia donna, mentre che vivia,
 Donne gentili, volontier con vui,
 Non voi' parlare altrui.”

Meanwhile in the central *canzone*, written while Beatrice was still alive, Dante describes to certain ladies a vision of her death :

“Io dissi: ‘Donne, dicerollo a vui.’”

This is the arrangement of the lyrics primarily according to their form, as Professor Norton explains it in the three editions of his translation. In the third edition¹ he shows also how a different numerically symmetrical division can be made out, according to subject; this had apparently never been noticed before. The first ten poems concern Dante's own experiences as a lover; after them he takes up “a new and more noble theme,”² the praise of his lady. The tenth poem of the second group is interrupted by the death of Beatrice, and again Dante takes up a “new subject.”³ Finally, after the third group of ten, we come to the final sonnet, which is distinct from the rest, and is called “una cosa nuova.”⁴ This last poem, like the *canzoni* which begin the second and third groups, is addressed to “gentle ladies.” This scheme: 10 + 10 + 10 + 1, recalls the grouping into three canticles of the cantos in the *Divina Commedia*: (1 + 33) + 33 + 33.

Since pointed out by Professor Norton, the symmetrical grouping of the shorter poems around the *canzoni* has until recently always been accepted as a fact, where mentioned at all, as by Witte,⁵ D'Ancona,⁶ Scartazzini,⁷ Mazzoni,⁸ Carpenter,⁹ and Moore,¹⁰ all of whom give credit for the discovery to Professor Norton. Two writers have used it as an important

¹*The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, translated by C. E. Norton; Boston and New York, 1892, p. 133.

²*V. N.*, 17.

³*V. N.*, 30.

⁴*V. N.*, 41.

⁵*La Vita Nuova di Dante*, ed. C. Witte, Leipzig, 1876, p. xx.

⁶*La Vita Nuova di D. A.*, ill. per A. d'Ancona, 2^a ed., Pisa, 1884, p. 175.

⁷*Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Milano, 1898-99, vol. II, p. 2159.

⁸Review of Earle's article, mentioned below; *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, VI, 59.

⁹*The Episode of the Donna Pietosa*, by G. R. Carpenter, in *Eighth Annual Report of the Dante Society*, Cambridge, 1889, p. 39.

¹⁰*Studies in Dante*, second series, pp. 115, 130.

element in their theories,—John Earle¹ in his interpretation of the *Vita Nuova*, and G. Federzoni² in discussing the date of its composition. Another writer³ appears to think that he has discovered symmetry in the *Vita Nuova* for the first time. But in 1901 a violent attack was made on the whole theory of symmetrical arrangement by Michele Scherillo;⁴ and as a number of critics⁵ have since declared the theory “demolished,” it is a matter of some interest to determine whether anything of it remains.

Scherillo's chief argument is simply a general denial that any symmetry exists. The self-evident fact that the four poems of intermediate length do not occupy symmetrical positions with reference to each other, seems to him a fatal weakness. Indeed, he declares that the presence of a fourth *canzone*, even a short one, is sufficient alone to overthrow the whole scheme of pretended symmetry. Counting up lines, he finds that the first ten poems have 182, the last ten 152. The *stanza*, although very like a sonnet, is not one, strictly speaking, for one of its lines has only seven syllables. The first and third *canzoni*, although they correspond in subject, fail to do so in metrical structure; their rhymes are not similarly arranged, and although each has five fourteen-line stanzas, one has a six-line *commiato* in addition. The structure is, then, lop-sided. And why, continues Scherillo, is there no symmetry in the arrangement of the prose paragraphs? In reply to this, it is only necessary to recall that the numbering

¹ Dante's ‘*Vita Nuova*,’ published anonymously in the *Quarterly Review*, CLXXXIV, 24–53 (July, 1896); in Italian in the *Biblioteca Storico-critica d. Lett. Dantesca*, XI, Bologna, 1899, with the author's name.

² *Quando fu composta la “Vita Nuova”?*, first published in 1898 in *Roma Letteraria*; reprinted in *Studi e Diparti Danteschi*, Bologna, 1902.

³ M. Martinozzi, *Sovra la partizione della Vita Nuova*, Modena, 1902. I have not seen this work, and know it only through reviews in *Giornale Storico*, XL, 457, and *Rassegna Bibliografica d. Lett. Ital.*, x, 197.

⁴ *La Forma architettonica della Vita Nuova*, in *Giornale Dantesco*, IX, 84.

⁵ See *Giornale Storico*, XXXVIII, 470, XL, 457, and XLI, 390; *Rassegna Bibliog.*, IX, 235, and x, 197; E. Lamma, *Questioni Danteschi*, Bologna, 1902, pp. 145, 163.

of the paragraphs was not done by Dante, and is not found either in the manuscripts or the early editions;¹ but in any case we should not expect the prose commentary to be treated like the verse.

After reading these arguments, one is tempted simply to ask: "What of it?" For, as a matter of fact, they leave absolutely untouched the essential part of the theory,—twenty-eight short poems arranged symmetrically around three *canzoni*, which are in every way written on a different scale from the rest.² This much of symmetry, even if no more could be found, is too remarkable to be the result of chance. Scherillo thinks, however, that if Dante had intended any symmetry at all, he would have carried it out more thoroughly, as in the *Divina Commedia*, and would not have admitted irregularities. But we must remember that the scheme of the *Commedia* was surely arranged before any considerable part of the verses was written, whereas the *Vita Nuova* was made up out of materials already at hand;³ and, moreover, a counting-up of lines does not make cantos and canticles exactly equal. Unfortunately, Scherillo, the great value of whose researches, particularly on the *Vita Nuova*, no one will wish to deny, seems in this case to be actuated by a feeling of personal or "patriotic" hostility against foreign critics. Commenting on Dr. Moore's accidental misstatement that there are thirty-three lyrics in the *Vita Nuova*, he remarks that "arithmetic is surely not a matter of individual opinion, even in England."⁴ His own arithmetic, however,

¹ Cf. D'Ancona, *V. N. di Dante*, p. viii; Witte, *V. N. di D.*, p. xvi; *Rassegna Bibliog.*, x, 198.

² Cf. G. Federzoni, *Nota su la forma architettonica della V. N.*, in *Giornale Dantesco*, x, 3, where many of Scherillo's arguments are successfully refuted.

³ Scherillo's objection would have considerable force if we accepted the theory of Earle, *loc. cit.*, that the *V. N.* was written all at one time, contrary to Dante's statements.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 84. As to the number thirty-three, I have shown that the error comes from Rossetti through Aroux. In one place (*ibid.*), Scherillo has been unable to translate English correctly, for he says, quoting Moore, "the symmetry of its design," cioè del povero Dante."

is sufficiently individual to concoct this equation $(3 \times 10) + 3 = 43$. To sum up, then, he declares that anyone who believes that Dante had the intention of arranging the *Vita Nuova* symmetrically shows "deplorable ingenuousness and lack of critical training." It seems to me, however, that these deplorable qualities are shown rather by attempting to deny what is evident.

But the theory of symmetry has been carried further. The central *canzone*, it has been said, should be, both in subject and in form, the most important poem in the book. Thus Earle¹ maintains that if the *Vita Nuova* were biography, the third *canzone*, written in connection with the death of Beatrice, would occupy the central position, and not a subordinate one; hence, he argues, the facts, even if true, are of no importance; the symbolism is the thing. Precisely, returns Scherillo, who in general disagrees totally with Earle; if there were any symmetry, the third *canzone*, not the second, would necessarily be the centre. But do not both critics neglect Dante's distinct statement² that he does not intend to treat of the death of Beatrice? Written after Dante's eyes "had wept for some time,"³ the third *canzone* tells of his grief for Beatrice's death; but we need not necessarily connect it closely with the actual event, and we must remember its striking correspondence with the first *canzone*. In any case, as Professor Norton says,⁴ the second *canzone*, the most elaborate and important poem of the whole, serves to connect the life of Beatrice with her death, and rightfully holds the central position in the scheme. Federzoni⁵ agrees with this, and goes further; he believes that when the

¹Article cited; in *Quarterly Review*, p. 52; in Italian version, p. 77.

²"Avvegna che forse piacerebbe a presente trattare alquanto de la sua partita da noi, non è lo mio intendimento di trattarne qui per tre ragioni . . . e però lascio cotale trattato ad altro chiosatore," *V. N.*, 28. The "three reasons" have been thoroughly discussed by C. H. Grandgent, *Dante and St. Paul*, in *Romania*, xxxi, 14-27 (1902).

³*V. N.*, 31.

⁴*New Life*, 1892 edition, pp. 130-133.

⁵*Studi e Diporti Danteschi*, pp. 49-73.

poems were brought together the second *canzone* was written especially to occupy the central position. But the existence of a scheme does not depend on the relative importance of the three *canzoni*.¹

The second symmetrical grouping pointed out by Professor Norton exists simultaneously with the first in a very striking way, and cannot be entirely accidental; but just how far Dante arranged the double symmetry it is difficult to say. Of course, the second scheme depends, to some extent, on the first. The symbolic numbers *three* and *ten* are evident in both schemes. With a little ingenuity the number *nine*, which is so important in the *Vita Nuova*, can be found also; Rossetti² noticed that between the first and third *canzoni* are nine poems; Federzoni³ noticed the same thing, and also that between the first vision-sonnet and the first *canzone*, and again between the third *canzone* and the final vision-sonnet, there are also nine poems, so that this scheme, with *three nines*, results: $1 + 9 + 1 + 9 + 1 + 9 + 1$. However, to such ingenuities as this, little importance should be attached.

Various other schemes of dividing the *Vita Nuova* according to subject have been proposed, but the only one containing the element of symmetry is by Federzoni.⁴ After adopting the division into three parts as proposed by Rossetti, he makes in each of these three parts three subdivisions, or nine in all, as follows: First Part, announcement—awakening of love—vicissitudes of love; Second Part, praise of Beatrice—pre-sentiment of her death—death of Beatrice; Third Part, love for the *donna gentile*—reawakening of the first love—announcement of a grand vision. In this scheme, striking correspondences can easily be found. But even if we accept this partition as exhaustive and accurate, it is hardly possible to prove that Dante had any such elaborate arrangement in mind when he distributed the lyrics symmetrically.

¹ Cf. Lamma, *Questioni Dantesche*, p. 158.

² See letter, quoted above.

³ *Studi e Diporti*, p. 52.

⁴ See his article in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, already cited.

Assuming much or little of symmetrical arrangement, then, but assuming that it exists as a part of Dante's plan, in connection with the visions and the symbolic numbers,—why did the poet wish “to produce an effect of symmetry that is not to be found in life?”¹ Does this in itself necessarily prove that the *Vita Nuova* is made up of imaginary incidents, or that it has only a symbolic meaning? By no means. We must remember that in his earlier literary work Dante was influenced chiefly by Provençal models. The Troubadours were satisfied to lavish all their artifices on single poems; would not Dante think it a mark of superior power to be able to combine such separate poems into a symmetrically organic whole? The symmetry of construction in the *Divina Commedia* cannot be found in earlier descriptions of visits to the other world; it is one of Dante's original contributions, as distinguished from what he derived by imitation. So in the *Vita Nuova*, out of materials already at hand, he wove together facts and fancies, experiences and imaginations, into an organic art-work to which he subsequently gave an allegorical interpretation.

Some Dante-scholars will say that this last statement implies too much belief in the historical accuracy of the *Vita Nuova*, others that it implies too little; but it seems to me to indicate the only rational basis for interpreting the book in connection with Dante's other works.² If a study of the Troubadours teaches us anything on this subject, it is that Dante founded his book on real events, which he worked into a narrative with various literary artifices. In this connection we must take account of the symmetrical construction of the book, which is one of these artifices; others are the modes of expression, such as the personification of love, and the use of the vision as a literary form. The art and symbol-

¹ Carpenter, *Episode of Donna Pietosa*, p. 39.

² Cf. I. del Lungo, *Beatrice nella Vita e nella Poesia del Secolo XIII*, Milano, 1891, p. 47 and *passim*; various other writers might be cited who express similar ideas.

ism do not, then, depend primarily on the invention of significant incidents, but on making incidents, whether real or invented, conform to the chosen scheme. In the *Convivio*,¹ with a different point of view, Dante gives an allegorical interpretation of the last part of the *Vita Nuova*, which has led many to believe that the book had no other meaning. But Dante tells us that although the true and fundamental meaning of any work is the allegorical, the literal meaning must come first.² So he wrote his poems as they were suggested to him from time to time by circumstances, without thinking either of an allegorical interpretation or of a scheme for symmetrical arrangement. Indeed, it was probably not until after the death of Beatrice, the episode of the Donna Pietosa, and the renewal of his faithfulness to Beatrice's memory, that the idea came to him of collecting his scattered verses into a book which should give a connected account of his New Life. The symmetrical structure of the book is strong evidence that he arranged the poems and wrote the prose all at one time. Hence it follows that his mental attitude when he wrote the prose governed the selection and interpretation of the poems.³ For instance, the first sonnet, which was doubtless written, as Dante says, in 1283, describes a vision in which Love shows Beatrice to Dante, and then goes away weeping. In the prose description⁴ of this vision, however, Love carries Beatrice away towards Heaven. We find added, then, an idea which is not inconsistent with the words of the sonnet, but which surely was not in Dante's mind originally. The addition was presumably made for the purpose of making this first sonnet correspond with the last one in the book, which also describes a vision, and

¹ Trattato II, cap. 1.

² *Ibid.*; cf. *V. N.*, 25.

³ Cf. E. Gorra, *Per la Genesi della Divina Commedia*, in his *Fra Drammi e Poemi*, Milano, 1900, p. 117.

⁴ *V. N.*, 3. It is to be borne in mind that the prose was written ten years or more after the sonnet.

connects Love, Beatrice and Heaven.¹ Thus the book as a whole gains in unity and symmetry. So also the name of Beatrice, aside from one exceptional case,² is not mentioned in the verses written during her life; but in the prose it is frequently mentioned, and she is spoken of at the very beginning as glorified in Heaven. It would be possible, then, to find an allegorical meaning in the prose and not in the verse, if such an interpretation were otherwise desirable.

Following a similar line of reasoning, Federzoni³ maintains that several of the poems were written, not when they purport to have been, but simultaneously with the prose, or even later, in order to fit into the symmetrical scheme. The second *canzone* in particular, he thinks, judging both from its subject and from its style as compared with the accompanying prose, could not have been written until after Dante's final and complete return to Beatrice, as related in the *Purgatorio*, xxx and xxxi. Now since Dante dates his great vision in 1300, Federzoni thinks that the *Vita Nuova* must have been composed either in or shortly before that year.⁴ But this conclusion rests on a misapprehension; just

¹ This was suggested by Gorra, *loc. cit.* If we accept his interpretation, we have no need to explain the sonnet as Dante's first conception of the *Divina Commedia*, or as a reference to Beatrice's death or marriage. The commentators who advanced these interpretations were trying to explain the prose rather than the sonnet itself.

² This is in the fourteenth sonnet (*V. N.*, 24), of which the ninth line reads: "Io vidi monna Vanna e monna Bice." Scherillo has suggested (see *Giorn. Dantesco*, x, 110; *Bullettino d. Soc. Dant. Ital.*, ix, 43) that this sonnet was written only for the eye of Guido Cavalcanti, whose lady was Vanna; in that case, the exception would prove the rule. "Monna Vanna e monna Bice" are mentioned again in Dante's sonnet: "Guido, vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io," which is not included in the *V. N.*; a new reading and interpretation have been suggested in this case by Barbi (see *Bullettino*, iv, 160).

³ *Studi e Diporti*, pp. 47-76, 123-153.

⁴ Federzoni does not at all depend on the argument that the twenty-fourth sonnet refers to a pilgrimage of 1300. This argument, advanced by Lubin in 1862, and once accepted by many critics, was demolished once for all by Pio Rajna, *Per la Data della Vita Nuova*, in *Giornale Storico*, vi, 113 ff.

as the vision was a conventional literary form, so the date 1300 was chosen for external reasons, and not because Dante had any particular inner experience at that time. The idea of the *Divina Commedia* developed gradually, and certainly had not reached its final form until long after the *Vita Nuova* was finished.¹ Thus the most probable date for the composition of the *Vita Nuova* still remains between 1293 and 1295;² but so far as the fictitious date 1300 goes, the *Divina Commedia* might have been conceived long before. Federzoni's arguments from the style of the second *canzone* will appeal to a reader who is predisposed to agree with them; but they are largely subjective, and their validity is disputed.³

That Dante, not finding all the poems that he needed for his scheme, may have written some for particular positions in the *Vita Nuova* while he was writing the prose, is not in itself impossible.⁴ Yet we must notice that he excuses the omission of a poem on the death of Beatrice, and does not furnish the poem. On the other hand, he does not use all the poems already written; and one factor in determining his choice was no doubt the symmetrical scheme. Thus the first *canzone* of the *Convivio*, *Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*, relates the events of the last part of the *Vita Nuova*. Provided the scheme had allowed another long *canzone*, this one would naturally have found a place there, if, as seems probable, it was written before the *Vita Nuova* was finished.⁵ By being

¹ Cf. Gorra, *op. cit.*

² See Casini, *V. N.*, p. xx; Scartazzini, *Dante-Handbuch*, Leipzig, 1892, p. 285; Paget Toynbee, *Dante Dictionary*, Oxford, 1898, s. v. *Vita Nuova*; D'Ancona e Bacci, *Manuale della Letteratura Italiana*, nuova edizione, Firenze, 1903, I, 283.

³ See Lamma, *Questioni Dantesche*, pp. 139 ff. Cf. *Bullettino d. Soc. Dant.*, VIII, pp. 32, 264, 267; *Rassegna Bibliog. d. Lett. It.*, VIII, 195.

⁴ So he may have changed the chronological position; the sonnet *Deh peregrini* (*V. N.*, 40) would more naturally come before the episode of the Donna Pietosa,—cf. Ronchetti, *Di un possibile spostamento nella tessitura della V. N.*, in *Giornale Dantesco*, II, 221.

⁵ It was written before 1295; cf. Scartazzini, *Dante-Handbuch*, p. 300; Carpenter, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 f., 60. But Angelitti, *Cronologia delle opere minori di Dante*, Città di Castello, 1886, pp. 3 ff., says 1296.

reserved for the *Convivio*, it received a different interpretation from what it would have had in the *Vita Nuova*. It is not necessary to discuss here which of the extant poems attributed to Dante were contemporaneous with the *Vita Nuova*, and might have found a place in it if the poet had so willed.¹ But evidently in studying this question the symmetrical scheme of the book should not be neglected.

In conclusion, what are we to say of the artistic value of this artifice which is so foreign to our modern methods? Let us answer the question with this other, asked by an American poet:² "Is love less love because the lover in the very heavenly excess of his devotion shall wreath it about with all the flowers his fancy can gather under the whole heaven of poetry?"

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¹ Cf. D'Ancona, *Vita Nuova*, 2a ed., pp. 117-123.

² Sidney Lanier, *Shakespeare and his Forerunners*, New York, 1902, I, 169.